

MINUTES

September 2, 2021

Members present: William Rutherford, Eric Brower, Nancy S. Dickinson, Gary Silberberg, Urling Searle, Laura di Bonaventura, and Theodore H. Walworth III.

Staff present: Patricia Sesto, Director of Environmental Affairs; Sarah Cocco, Conservation, Resource Manager; and Aleksandra Moch, Environmental Analyst

1) Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 7:03 pm by Rutherford

2) Seating of Alternates:

Walworth was seated for Henrey and di Bonaventura was seated for Baker.

3) Review and approve minutes of July 1, 2021:

Silberberg made a motion to approve the minutes as corrected. Motion was seconded by Brower and carried 7-0-0.

4) Review of Correspondence: no correspondence

5) Chairman's Report:

Rutherford referenced the FEMA grant provided for raising house at the coast in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy. Some of the projects were financed in advance and one of the recipients has breached the contract and FEMA is looking to be reimbursed. The grant contract was not strictly adhered, nullifying the grant. As the middleman of sorts, the Town is responsible for paying back the money. The Town is having trouble getting the money from the owner of this property as they have moved out of state. The Board of Selectmen granted their approval for the \$90,000 be released to FEMA. There is a hope the owner will be held responsible for the amount; the process however may be complicated due to the different state jurisdictions.

Rutherford turned to Sesto to ask for a report on the recent flooding and how the data was recorded by the gauging station installed at Byram River. Sesto responded the app associated with the station sends her notification once the flood elevation reaches a certain height. Unfortunately, the gauge station was not operable. Precipitation data collected by USGS showed a 5-inch accumulation over 75 minutes in Pemberwick, which was a record high rain fall detected in this area. This measurement was way above a 100-year storm. Sesto noted, street drainage system is designed only for a 25-year storm event.

di Bonaventura had observed severe flooding over the area designated for the refurbished playing fields on the Greenwich Country School property adjacent to Greenwich Creek. The Conservation Commission was involved in the project review.

Sesto is considering a press release about the severity of the storm and what it meant for the town.

6) Conference / Program Reminders:

- a) International Coastal Cleanup Day – Saturday, September 18th, Greenwich Point and Great Captain’s Island
- b) Community Bike Fest on Saturday, September 25th 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM at Living Hope Community Church.
- c) Join Pedal Greenwich for a morning of free fun and activities in Old Greenwich aimed at bringing together everyone who supports a connected, friendlier community.
- d) Waste Justice event and The Sacrifice Zone screening, September 28th – moderated by Sarah Coccaro
- e) Sunday, October 3rd First Sunday Science Series (Bruce Museum) co-hosted with Conservation Commission lecture with Dr. James O’Donnell, Professor at UConn and Executive Director of CT Institute for Resilience & Climate (CIRCA)

7) Ongoing projects: a written staff report was provided to the members on the following topics:

- a) Pollinator Pathway

Walworth had asked about the mural. Sesto responded it is a part of the educational program. Pollinator Pathway consist of 75 members including local garden club members and several environmental organizations in town. Three of the Conservation Commissioners are part of this group which is led by Moch and Myra Klockenbrink. The funds for the mural were provided by the Greenwich Botanical Center with the support of Sustainable CT Community Match Fund. There is a provision in the Conservation Commission budget allowing to receive grants for educational programs. The Board of Selectmen had approved the mural on their August 25th meeting. The project is going to be heard by several RTM committees and full RTM on September 27th. Walworth concluded there was some confusion regarding the process, he was thankful for Sesto’s clarification.

Sesto added the project went through several approvals by the First Selectman, DPW, DOT and was reviewed by the Law Department. The Conservation Commission has been updated in the written staff reports about the status. The members of RTM who questioned the project had not reached out to Sesto.

- b) Sustainable CT application – deadline was August 24, 2021:

Sesto was pleased with the outcome. She recognized and thanked the staff and Cecilia de Bonaventura for all their hard work. It was a team effort and the submission included coverage of a vast majority of the topic areas. She also noted there were more resources available this time around.

Silberberg made a motion to thank the staff for their hard work including Cecilia. The motion was seconded by Searle and carried 7-0-0

8) Fisheries/Wildlife: a written staff report was provided to the members

- a) Purple Martins: Coccaro was recognized for writing an article about purple martins.

Silberberg asked about efforts in town to preserve bat populations. Moch responded the efforts are focused on preservation of trees in the designated bat habitats at the sites slated for development.

9) Education/Outreach: a written staff report was provided to the members

- a) Bruce Museum/Conservation Commission citizen science project, “Greenwich Flood Watchers.”

Coccaro invited James O’Donnell, Executive Director of CIRCA, responsible for sustainable strategies to enhance the resilience of the built environment while protecting natural ecosystems in Connecticut and the northeast to be a presenter on October 7th. Prof. O’Donnell has been also involved in the development of a permanent ocean observing system in Long Island Sound and the adjacent shelf. Through a citizen science approach, his new app helps to collect photo documentation of flooded areas in Greenwich.

10) Committee and Liaison Reports

- a) Transportation and Air Quality subcommittee: a written staff report was provided to the members
- b) GRAB: Dickinson stated the Waste Free Greenwich monthly letter was released on September 1st. She encouraged everyone to read it and find the wealth of information on the recent efforts.
- c) Parks and Rec Board – was not discussed
- d) Harbor Management Commission –was not discussed
- e) Open Space Committee – the committee took a break for the summer

11) Old Business

- a) CTDOT Corridor Study grant: no update

12) New Business:

Dickinson, Brower, and Sesto met with a local mason to discuss the wall at the Byram Cemetery. They are awaiting estimates for surveying and masonry work.

Silberberg was concerned about work being done on an existing garage situated at the corner of Stanwich and Cat Rock Roads. The structure is located in a close proximity to the old burial ground. Henrey and Dickinson had gathered some basic information about this site in the past. Brower pointed out the site plan permit protects the site and P&Z should be notified if there are any encroachments. Silberberg will share the photographs taken at the site with Dickinson.

Sesto recognized di Bonaventura for her contribution to the newly released report of the Energy Advisory Committee. di Bonaventura stated the report portrays where the town stands in terms of the energy use and greenhouse gases emission. The reference also compares Greenwich to other towns and makes recommendations for the future projects. The data is encouraging, but there is room for improvements. The Town Hall building for example ranks below the national median of efficiency in the old building category and in this type of climate.

Walworth asked about the savings. di Bonaventura responded the Town’s an annual energy costs are approximately \$7million. During the COVID year the cost decreased to \$6 million. One million

could be easily saved by improving efficiency. Generation of greenhouse gasses is of a concern. The use of renewable energy may lead to additional \$2 million in savings. The cost is mainly driven by the energy distribution and peak loads. di Bonaventura took the opportunity to thank Coccaro for introducing her to Energy Portfolio Star Managers. This tool helps to measure and track energy and water consumption, as well as greenhouse gas emissions for the report.

13) Adjourn – next meeting is October 7, 2021

A motion was made by Silberberg and seconded by Dickinson to adjourn at 8:23pm.